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Oslo is dead

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The silence was broken one month ago today. That day marked the first in a series of deadly terrorist suicide bombings, which killed more than 60 and injured hundreds in a two-week period. The silence had held for six blissful months since the last bus bombing, also in Jerusalem, on Aug. 21, 1995, when five Israelis were killed and more than 100 injured. It was generally assumed and reported in the media that the lack of terrorist attacks on Israel was the result of protracted negotiations between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority (PA) and that the silence was broken to avenge the death of Hamas bomb-maker Yehiya Ayyash, "The Engineer," who was killed by a booby-trapped cellular phone on Jan. 5, supposedly by the Israelis. But what if the reason for the absence of terrorist attacks for almost half a year was an agreement had been reached between the PA and Hamas? What if Yasser Arafat negotiated with Hamas and agreed to the timing of acts of terror against Israel? Well, it happened. The heavily reported negotiations between the PA and Hamas in the fall of last year resulted in an agreement on Dec. 22, 1995, but not the one everyone in the West was hoping for. News reports stated that Mr. Arafat was engaged in discussions with Hamas in order to have that organization renounce its terrorist past and join the election campaign for the new Palestinian Council.

The talks between the PA and Hamas in the fall of 1995 did not have the hoped for result of Hamas agreeing to join the election process for the new Palestinian Council. Instead, they resulted in an agreement from Hamas to halt its terrorist attacks on Israel until after the Palestinian elections were over and to abide by Mr. Arafat's stipulation that future attacks would not be based in areas of PA control. In other words, Hamas agreed to halt suicide bombings until after Jan. 20 and arranged for the actual bombers to organize and plan in areas of the West Bank still under Israeli control, so as not to embarrass Mr. Arafat. Both parties agreed that Hamas was free to continue its activities as long as those two conditions were met. The press conference was mostly attended by members of the Arab media, the news of the agreement did not make it into the Western press.

Muhammad Subayh, Palestinian delegate to the Arab League discussed the agreement on the Egyptian television program "The Arab Home." Mr. Subayh said, "Those who carried out the suicide operations in Israel came

from Hebron, which is under Israeli control, so why make excuses and blame the Palestinian people?"

At the press conference in December, **Selim** Za'anoun, head of the PLO delegation to talks with Hamas, had repeated the same mantra: "This should be understood by all. We are not the defenders of the Israeli entity [sic]. We see it as sufficient to obligate Hamas not to embarrass the PA, which is responsible for security in the areas it has received, and from which it will not allow action." He continued, "If Israel wants to spare itself Hamas attacks, it had better hurry and withdraw from the rest of the territories." Mr. Za'anoun emphasized that when he called Mr. Arafat to report on the agreement with Hamas, the PLO chairman replied, "[May] Allah bless you, this is good, this is nice."

Mr. Arafat's actions are not surprising considering his past history, but what is truly shocking has been the reaction of the Israeli government to these allegations. Benny Begin, a Likud Knesset member, alerted to the agreement by Israeli terrorism expert Yigal Carmon, has been trying for some time to get anyone to pay attention to this development. He confronted Prime Minister Shimon Peres during a Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee meeting. Mr. Peres responded, "I don't know anything about an agreement between the PLO and Hamas, nor do I care." Over the past two weeks, on various Israeli news and interview programs, Mr. Begin has tried to talk about this issue, only to be shouted down by senior government cabinet officials.

The truth is that the Israeli government cannot afford to admit that such an agreement exists because it essentially nullifies the Oslo accords. Either Mr. Arafat negotiates in the name of the Palestinian people and in good faith with the Israeli government for a peace settlement or he negotiates with Hamas. He cannot shake Mr. Peres' hand in the name of peace while at the same time shaking hands with Hamas in the name of the destruction of Israel